Prairie Update

VOLUME 16 SPRING 2003

Hello Voluntary Stewards!

And "*Hello spring!*" After a long, cold winter, there are many people and many calves that are glad the warm weather has finally arrived. Even though it has been so cold, our staff have been very busy finalizing demonstration projects, holding workshops, and delivering presentations.

You may notice that this issue of the Update has a strong focus on youth and range management.

Encouraging and recognizing youth initiatives has been a strong interest of Watershed Authority employees, Etienne Soulodre, Ross Macdonald, and Shelanne Wiles.

In early February, Ross and Etienne travelled to the Society for Range Management's annual meeting and conference in Casper, Wyoming with high school student, Lane Burgess and University of Saskatchewan students, Julie Korol, Alicia Hargrave and Steve Hankey. While Ross and Etienne made presentations at the conference, they were excited to report about the success of Saskatchewan's youth contingent.

Lane made a presentation at a high school forum, and the university students did well in an undergraduate range competition. Alicia, we are proud to add, has also accepted a summer position in our Stewardship Division.

We hope you enjoy their stories.

Please see the back of the newsletter for more information on a new set of fact sheets we have published. They focus on controlling invasive species in native rangelands and are now available upon request.

As always, if you have any questions or comments on articles in the Prairie Update, or if you have suggestions for articles you would like to see, please contact us. We'd love to hear from you.

Jennifer Lohmeyer

University Students Score High at International Range Competition

By Tracy Harrison

Photo

Julie Korol, Steve Hankey and Alicia Hargrave

Three students from the University of Saskatchewan's Stockman's Club have brought recognition to their school in the area of range management.

As a team, Julie Korol, Alicia Hargrave and Steve Hankey placed fourth out of 19 universities at an international range management competition held in Casper, Wyoming in early February.

Team coordinator, Janice Bruynooghe, said the students did well despite their limited preparation time.

While the University had a Range Club in the past, it was only revived as a division of the Stockman's Club in November of 2002. Adding to the workload of studying for the competition's "*Undergraduate Range Management Exam (URME),*" these students also knew the trip coincided with their university midterms.

Janice said, *"They were competing against students who come from universities that have fielded teams for many years and have coaches and support staff who are experts at doing this. A number of universities even*

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A Youthful Look at Range Management

By Tracy Harrison

Lane Burgess, Circle Y Ranch

Kids really do listen to their parents.

And they even take pride in what they've learned.

At 16, Lane Burgess of Big Beaver, Sask. is an example of that. After writing an essay about stewardship practices on his family's ranch - he was selected to participate in a high school forum in Casper, Wyoming in early February.

The forum, held in conjunction with the Society for Range Management's annual meeting and conference, allowed 21 high school students to make presentations and mingle with land managers, range specialists, scientists and biologists from the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Lane, a Grade 11 student at Coronach High School, was the only Canadian youth to participate in the forum.

And his topic of choice really hit home.

"*It was kind of a rangeland action plan for our ranch. Some things we've recently done and things we're doing now,*" said Lane, noting the ranch, located two-and-a-half miles from the U.S. border, in the heart of the Big Muddy Badlands, has been in the family since 1937. Encompassing close to 20,000 acres of native prairie, it sustains a 350 head cow-calf operation.

Lane's dad, Michael Burgess, said he enjoyed seeing a description of the ranch through his son's eyes and chuckled that it was nice to see how much his son "*really was paying attention.*"

"*I talked a little bit about pasture rotations, water quality and grasses,*" said Lane. "*Different pastures have different grasses in them. We try to use the tame grasses in the spring so that we're not pressuring our native grass during the growing season. There are different delicate areas on the ranch that we have to be conscious about. And the weather too.*

"*A lot of people down there don't have the severe weather that we have. That's one of the things they were interested in. We have the snow, so we can't graze all year - but we have to be conscious about how much we do graze.*"

Lane became aware of the forum in late November when he saw an article by Ross Macdonald in the Saskatchewan Stockgrower Magazine. Based on an essay contest, one youth would be chosen to represent the Prairie Parkland Chapter of the Society for Range Management, which includes Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

In late December, Lane found out that he had won. Shortly after, Ross paid him a visit and gave him some tips for putting together a power point presentation.

Lane said the Wyoming trip, sponsored by Ducks Unlimited Canada and Sask Power, was a "*real eye opener*" because he "*learned how much there is to learn about range management.*"

"*I think it's important for kids to get involved like this,*" he said, adding the students had much to contribute.

"*I learned a lot just from our presentations. We were always told down there that the high school students had the best presentations because we worked on them so much.*," said Lane, noting that topics ranged from plant species and sage grouse to basic range management principles and prescribed burning.

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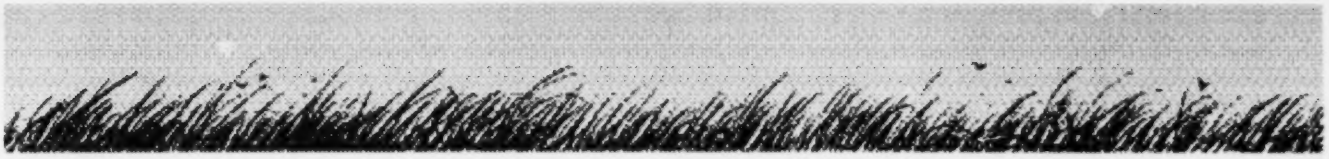


Lane Burgess's Presentation

Good Afternoon, I'm Lane Burgess from Big Beaver, Saskatchewan. I'm representing the Prairie Parkland Chapter of the Society for Range Management in the Northern Great Plains. I'm a 16-year-old, fourth generation rancher with a keen interest in range management.

In 1937, my great grandfather R.F. Burgess came from Ontario to the South Central Region of Saskatchewan called the Big Muddy Badlands. He purchased three ranches totalling 25.5 sections. His operation started with grass fattened steers and horses. Like most ranches in the area, there was little to no range management being practiced; steers grazed for 2-3 years until fat then were sold to packers in the East for slaughter. In the early 1960s the grass fat market dropped off due to surplus in grains, and meat packers demanded more grain fattened beef. This was a prominent factor in the decision of converting the ranch. The new backgrounding system consisted of yearlings being held on grass for one season then sent to feedlots to be fattened on grain. Through proper range management techniques, like water development and cross fencing, the land was made more productive than ever.

Although having a good reputation for quality cattle, the time involved away from the ranch in the purchasing and marketing prompted my father to make further changes. In the late 1980s, he converted the ranch to a cow-calf operation with a herd of Black Angus cows. Still no changes are permanent, they are only minor steps in a great evolving environment.

Our goals are to insure valuable range protection by using modern techniques and traditional methods of grazing properly. This is not a "get rich quick scheme," but we feel that it is viable and environmentally sustainable. Maintaining water quality and availability, protecting delicate areas, and functioning with a reserve of forage is of the utmost importance to us.

The Northern Great Plains is in the 225-275 mm precipitation range which causes us to need a substantial forage reserve. Because of the drought stricken periods in the ranch's history, we prefer to run fewer cattle. AUMs are the set way to calculate a basis for grazing management. An AUM is the amount of forage consumed by one animal for one month, based on a 1000 pound animal requiring an average of 26 pounds dry forage per day. Our conservative stocking rate is the way we control range conditions. The grass reserves we have are utilized in three ways. It shields the fress grass from the extreme elements, like wind, cold and heat. In winter, it traps snow and in spring and summer controls water erosion by slowing runoff. The third way is by utilizing our AUMs over a longer period of time, giving us a cushion in drought years.

To lessen the dependence on purchased feed we have seeded marginal farm land, bought in the 1950s, down to tame forages for winter feeding supplies.

Over the years of increasing cow numbers, we have had to concentrate on cross fencing and water development. We have moved from a long duration grazing method to a higher intensity/shorter duration method which calls for smaller pastures. In recent years, we have built several fences to achieve our goals. Historically, the south and east sides of the ranch were overgrazed while the middle and west were often undergrazed. Fences were built to separate these areas to let the overgrazed areas recover.

Two large pastures have been cross fenced to conform to our management plans, to best utilize the desirable characteristics of each part of the ranch.

As for water development, we started this process in the 60s by developing natural springs and digging reservoirs to trap spring runoff, these we refer to as dugouts. We have further developed the dugouts by adding solar pumping systems. The systems are designed for maneuverability and reliability. Each system consists of a 24 volt solar powered pump and a 1125 gallon stock trough placed near a dugout. The water is then pumped from the dugout to the trough. This will supply 250 cows with clean water. With less traffic in and out of the dugout, the water quality and quantity is improved. A pipeline is in the plans for the near future, for a crested wheat grass field located on the north end of the ranch. A two-mile pipeline will reach out to the field that is now out of range of any other water supply.

Improved range management complements wildlife. Our fencing program to keep the cattle off the shores of Big Muddy Lake is protecting Piping Plover habitat. Increased cover and undisturbed nesting grounds protect upland birds. Sharp tail "Leks" or dancing grounds are numerous on the ranch and mule deer are plentiful. Posting "Foot Hunting Only" signage has eliminated much of the damaging vehicle traffic.

The basic theory that goes into how we manage the land is "modern demands vs. traditional practices." Alone, these two ideas would not work. A lot of traditional practices are not accepted in today's culture, such as trailing a herd of cattle hundreds of miles, or turning cattle out into pastures too large or with insufficient water. Society has learned that such practices produce harsh long term effects and permanent range damage. The right balance is needed to remain operating into the future.

I would like to take this time to thank the Society for Range Management and my sponsors Sask Power and Ducks Unlimited Canada for giving me the opportunity to come to Casper and present my views to all of you. I would also like to invite all of you to come to Saskatchewan, June 18th to 20th. For our Native Appreciation Week, a field tour will be held on our ranch.

In closing, I would like to state that we plan to continue to work towards superior range management to ensure the Circle Y is productive for generations to come. The land is not ours, we are just the caretakers and we do all we can to conserve and protect the land. Thank you again.

Burgess story continued from page 2...

In addition to the forum, a local tour for the students included visits to the Price Ranch, the Fish and Game Authority and an urban oil refinery that closed in 1991. Lane said reclamation efforts around the refinery included a focus on cleaning up the North Platte River.

A highlight of the trip, however, was the opportunity to talk to people in the range management field. Through a "*Tapping the Top" session, a "Professional Interactions*" dinner and a general awards banquet, Lane said students were able to ask lots of questions.

"*That was one of the best things. There's so many people - and you can walk up and talk to anybody. It was really interesting,*" he said, noting the conference drew approximately 1500 people.

To round out the forum, the students also took some time for personal reflection.

Lane said, "*We listened to a presentation on making presentations and how you present yourself. It was really good. It was just everything about your goals in life and things like that - not just range management.*"

So is Lane going to continue the family tradition of ranching?

"*I'd like to - but I think I'm going to go and get an agri-business course or something and spend a few years doing something else. And then come back,*" he concluded. ■

University story continued from page 1...

have undergraduate courses which are partly geared towards preparing the students for this exam.

"For our students to do as well as they did - I think its such a credit to them - they just did amazing. We're able to come back now and say - look at what our students can do."

The exam questions covered everything from the general range regions of western North America to grazing management, animal nutrition, range ecology, range improvement (the use of fire, herbicide and fertilizer), range inventory and multiple use relations.

Janice said, "*You have to be a pretty well rounded student to do well on the exam.*"

Individually, the students also received scores. An exceptional performance came from Julie who placed 4th out of 120 students.

Going beyond the challenge of this exam, Alicia participated in a separate competition, having to identify 100 plants in 100 minutes.

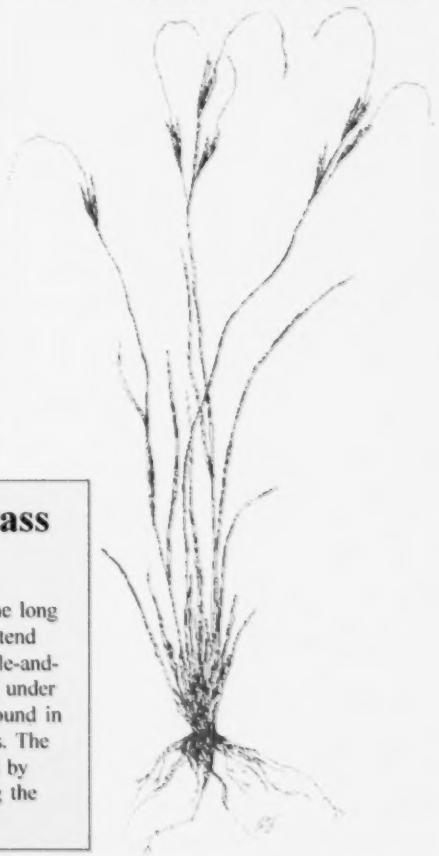
Janice concluded that many people were involved in the team's success. "*I was given the 'title' and hired to be the coordinator - but there were all kinds of 'in kind' contributions. Everyone rallied around this initiative. They saw the importance of bringing new students up into the ranks and getting them down there.*

"For our students that are going to be graduating this spring and looking for jobs - that was a great opportunity. They learned so much that they're going to be able to put to use. And I think that's one of the benefits of funding support and being able to take a team down there. It just opens their eyes to bigger opportunities."

Since the competition is held in conjunction with the Society for Range Management's annual meeting, the students heard various presentations and rubbed shoulders with experts from across North America.

Alicia Hargrave, who spearheaded the University's new Range Club said, "*I think it was a really good experience to get exposed to this conference. The sessions we went to on range management principles and how to sustain biodiversity were excellent. It was great to go to a place where range management is so widely talked about - and I think we need to take something back from that.*"

Editor's note: *In addition to financial support from the University President's Fund, the College of Agriculture, the Department of Animal Science and the Department of Plant Science - the team received funding through the Agricultural Environmental Stewardship Initiative which is a Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development in Saskatchewan program funded by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Funds were raised through a proposal made by the Prairie Parkland Chapter of the Society for Range Management (SRM). Additional financial support came from the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority and Ducks Unlimited Canada.* ■



Western Porcupine Grass

(Stipa curtiseta)

This clump grass is most recognizable by the long awns resembling porcupine quills, which extend from the seeds. It is closely related to needle-and-thread grass, but occurs on better soils and under higher moisture conditions such as those found in the fescue prairie and eastern prairie regions. The seeds of this plant are readily used for food by various species of grassland birds including the Chestnut-collared Longspur.

Farm Family Takes Pride In Riparian Management Plan

By Tracy Harrison

When livestock producer Dale McAuley and his family decided to expand their land base in 2001 - they wanted to "*do things right*."

The McAuleys, who live northeast of Moosomin, near the small town of Welwyn, purchased a half section of cropland that had a ravine passing through its centre.

"*We wanted to seed it down to grass and have pasture for our cattle*," said Dale, noting their first priority was to develop a riparian management plan.

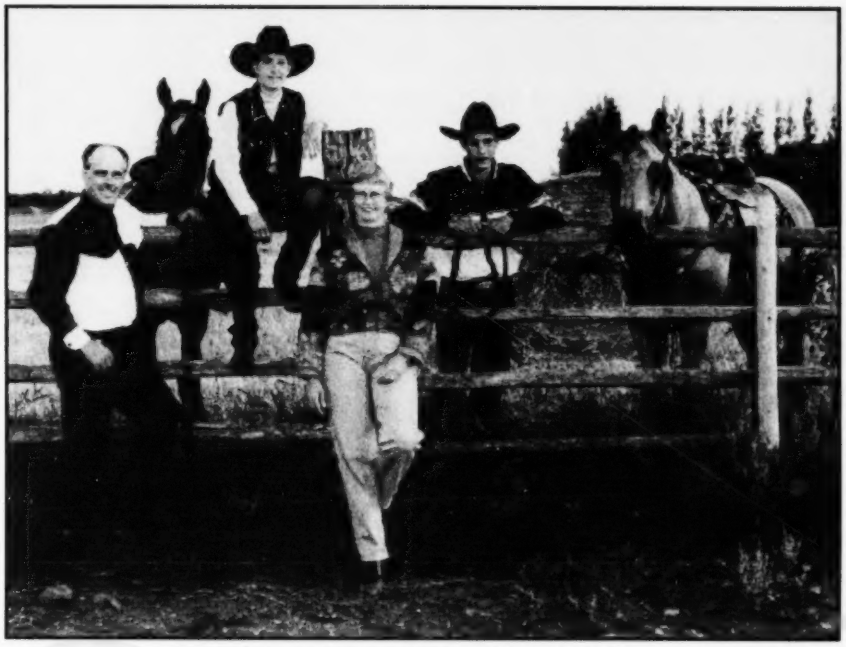
To help them do so, the McAuleys consulted with Jennifer Lohmeyer, Etienne Soulodre and Tom Harrison of the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, as well as Lorne Klein, a range agrologist with Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization.

Dale said, "*Before we even did any work on that land we wanted to make sure that we were setting it up as a pasture properly and working with people who could help us make sure we were doing it right. We know there is more concern about waterways, so we went through our ag rep to find out who would know more about these areas.*"

The McAuleys' concern for taking care of the land stems from a relationship that has evolved through several generations. The farm has been in the family for close to 100 years. Dale was raised on the farm and appreciates the surroundings he grew up in.

"*Scissors Creek runs through my home quarter. It's shaped like a scissor, with two creeks coming together just 400 yards away from my yard. We've got one creek coming up from the south and one creek from the north and they meet on my brother's quarter. From here it all goes down to the Assiniboine River*," he said.

Now the desire to take care of these areas is something he shares with a family of his own.



Photo

Dale, Cheri-Lynn, Valerie and Ryan McAuley

After Dale completed the Vocational Agriculture Program at the University of Saskatchewan, he returned to the farm. While he also works as a welder at the local potash mine, he has been able to expand the farm operation with the help of his wife Valerie, and partnership of their son Ryan, 23.

Including the two quarters they recently purchased, the McAuleys own seven quarters of land and run a cow calf operation of 95 angus cross cows. They also rent additional pasture 21 kilometres away near the mine.

Dale credits his son for taking much of the initiative in developing a riparian management plan for their expanding land base.

"*Ryan was very much involved in making the decisions. He did a lot of the leg work of finding out who we should talk to and he did a lot of research to find out what kind of species we should be seeding*," said Dale.

Through the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, the McAuleys implemented a riparian demonstration project. Their project was partially funded by the Agricultural Environmental Stewardship Initiative (AESI) which is administered through the Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development Fund in Saskatchewan (CARDS).

Basically, their project consisted of seeding down forages, fencing and developing a watering site.

Dale said, "*We seeded it down to cicer milkvetch, a little bit of alfalfa and brome. The cicer milkvetch is a legume that the cattle won't bloat on.*"

In an effort to create a fence that hopefully "*lasts forever*," the McAuleys used steel posts and three strands of barbed wire when they fenced the half section in 2001.

"*We also fenced the whole ravine out. There was an old fence there but we stayed back further from the bush*," said Dale, adding that in 2002, they divided the remaining pasture into five paddocks.

To provide the cattle with a new watering site, the McAuleys went through PFRA to create a dugout off to the side of the ravine. When they were unable to use it due to a lack of snowfall and spring runoff, they dug a second watering hole.

"*I set up a solar pump and pumped out of that hole for the summer to water the cattle*,"said Dale, adding that although the ravine was fenced out, the cattle still had limited access to it.

"*We didn't keep the cattle out of there completely. We used it once and then kept them out. And then in the fall, we let them back in there to graze it back down. If the cattle stay in there too much - they'll end up destroying the bush, cattails and willows. By keeping them back, it worked out good.*"

Eager to share his experience with others, Dale has made presentations to a variety of audiences including a local watershed stewardship group; participants in a water quality seminar and landowners. In the summer of 2002, the McAuleys' project was included in a tour of area stewardship projects.

"*It's good to open up people's eyes*," said Dale, noting he also enjoyed seeing the initiatives and creative solutions of other producers.

"*I'm very happy, I'm very satisfied and I'm proud of what we've done*," he concluded, adding he really appreciates the help his family received from the Watershed Authority.

"*Etienne and Tom were great to work with and very easy to get along with. They're not demanding that we have to do our project 'this way' or 'that way.' They just give you ideas and discuss things. I learned a lot and got a lot of information that is definitely going to help me.*"

"*One of the major things that made it very convincing for me to go ahead and work with these guys was that Tom was a cattleman himself. I feel that it's an image thing that we have to do as cattlemen. And if we try to do things properly - it's just a win-win operation. I think we're on the right wavelength. We're looking to the future, we're trying to save our ravines and we're trying to work with nature.*" ■

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow

Identification
Rarely seen, the Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow skulks in the tall grasses of wetland margins. Distinguishing field marks include a gray stripe on the top of the head, a gray patch on the back of the neck, and buffy orange-coloured eyebrow and breast. This sparrow is most easily detected by its song, a soft trill resembling the sizzling sound of water being added to bacon frying in the pan.

Present Status
The majority of the Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow summer range is in the Aspen Parkland region of prairie Canada. Information on Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow status is scarce, but suggests populations are stable.

Habitat Preference
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows are found in freshwater marshes and wet meadows with tall, dense grass. Wetland drainage is sure to reduce the amount of habitat available for this species. However, individuals are opportunistic and will establish territories in recently flooded areas provided suitable vegetation is present. Birds push their way through the vegetation as they walk along the ground looking for food.

Did You Know?

- Historically, Sharp-tailed Sparrows were thought to occur in several distinct groups; one population along the northeast Atlantic Coast, another along the southern shore of Hudson Bay, and a third population that ranges across the three Canadian prairie provinces and the Dakotas. Recently the Atlantic population was split into its own species, the Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow, whereas the other two groups became known as Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

- Unlike many other sparrows, male Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows may not defend territories, but simply compete with other males to mate with females passing close by their singing perches.

- Nests are built in clumps of dead grass left from the previous summer, and are located several cm above the mud or water.

Producers Share Stewardship Plans

By Tracy Harrison

If the grass is greener on the other side - does anybody know why?

A handful of producers in the Radville Grazing Club might have the answer. Since the club formed in the fall of 2001, members have been sharing ideas and comparing notes on the benefits of their stewardship projects. And they may tell you green isn't only the colour of envy.

Paul Fradette, a local livestock producer, said that club tours and presentations provide members with a closer look at the components of a healthy pasture and management practices that will help to keep it that way.

"*It's important to keep that old dead grass there. It keeps your ground cooler and keeps some of that moisture there*," said Paul, adding he's learned a lot about different types of species and the role of 'carry over.'

He also appreciates the one-on-one exchange of technical information and producer experiences.

"*There's just different things that you don't think of," said Paul. "You get to do some brainstorming with the other guys and ask them questions about what they're doing - like swath grazing or making different dugouts. It's stuff you've thought about doing, but were kind of wondering if it would actually work in your operation. This give you a chance to see what others have done first before you try it yourself."*

And that's something club organizers are happy to hear.

Originally, the club was initiated as a pilot project by Ducks Unlimited Canada and the former Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation, now part of the newly formed Saskatchewan Watershed Authority. Since these organizations have assisted a number of area landowners in developing stewardship projects - they decided to bring them together.

Radville Grazing Club Field Day

To do so, Ross Macdonald, a range agrologist, was recruited to coordinate club activities.

"*That's been a really good deal*," said Paul. "*Because to do it on our own - I don't think anything would happen. No one has the time to organize this kind of thing.*"

Among the highlights of the past year, Paul said he really enjoyed the quality and variety of presentations made by guest speakers including agrologists, range managers, riparian experts and beef specialists.

"*They're trying to give you as much information as they can to work with and improve things on your native prairie. I think it's an excellent thing,*" he concluded.

Note: Please watch our next issue of the Update for a profile on Paul Fradette's Stewardship project. If you would like more information about the Radville Grazing Club, contact Ross Macdonald at the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority in Weyburn at (306) 861-9893. ■

Watch for our displays at the following locations:

- Redvers Ag-Ex, April 3
- Tisdale Trade Fair, April 4 & 5
- Agri-Mex, North Battleford, April 4 to 6
- Sask. Phys. Ed Assoc Convention, Sheraton Cavalier, Saskatoon, May 7 to 9
- Environmental Trade Show, Centennial Civic Centre, Swift Current, May 21 & 22
- Saskatchewan Stock Growers AGM, Yorkton, June 1 to 3
- Western Canada Farm Progress Show, Regina, June 18 to 20

Please drop by and say hello!

Coming Events

"Beneficial Management For Healthy Watersheds"
Saskatoon Inn, Saskatoon
June 2 – 4, 2003
Hosted by Saskatchewan Network of Watershed Stewards (SNOWS) and Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA)

Nature Saskatchewan Spring Meeting
Jubilee Sports Centre
Rosthern, SK
June 6-8, 2003

Agenda:

- **Friday, June 6**
  3 to 5 pm Bird Quest-Plant Quest
  6 to 8 pm Registration
  8 to 8:30 Welcoming Remarks
  8:30 to 9:30 Guest Speaker -
  Anna Leighton "From mouse- root to rock-tripe." What the Cree taught Richardson about native plants.
- **Saturday, June 7**
  6 to 10 am Field trip to Nisbet Forest (bag breakfast)
  10 to 11 am Coffee break
  11 to 5 pm Field trip to Fort Carlton
  11 to 5 pm Field trip to Batoche
  6 to 7 pm Reception, cocktails
  7 to 8:30 pm Banquet
  8:30 to 10pm Guest speaker -
  Dr. Stuart Houston on the Franklin Expedition at Fort Carlton, 1820 and 1827.
- **Sunday, June 8**
  6 to 8 am Early morning bird walk - Seager Wheeler Farm
  8 to 9 am Registration and breakfast
  9 to 10:30 am Nature Saskatchewan Annual General Meeting
  10:30 to Noon
  Nature Saskatchewan Board Meeting

For further information call Nature Saskatchewan at (306) 780 - 9273

Please Note

A new set of eight fact sheets is available for landowners who manage native prairie. Each fact sheet discusses the need and options for managing or removing one of the following invasive species in native rangeland:

- Crested Wheatgrass
- Smooth Brome grass
- Leafy Spurge
- Nodding Thistle/Canada Thistle
- Trembling Aspen/Snowberry
- Downy Brome
- Scentless Chamomile
- Knapweed

If you are interested in receiving any or all of these new fact sheets, please contact Jennifer Lohmeyer at (306) 787-8707.

Funding for these fact sheets was provided by the Agricultural Environmental Stewardship Initiative, a program of Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development in Saskatchewan (CARDS) funded by Agriculture and Agri Food Canada.

Share Your Ideas . . .

Anyone with story ideas or coming events is welcome to share them with us at:

Attention: Jennifer Lohmeyer
#101 - 2022 Cornwall Street
Regina, SK. S4P 2K5
Phone: (306) 787 - 8707
Fax: (306) 787 - 0780
Email: jennifer.lohmeyer@swa.ca
Web site: www.wetland.sk.ca

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- Endangered Species Recovery Fund

Ducks Unlimited Canada
Environment Canada through Eco-ACTION
Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (U.S.)
Saskatchewan Agriculture Food and Rural Revitalization
Saskatchewan Environment through:
- Fish and Wildlife Development Fund

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